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Alum establishes charitable foundation to assist the poor

Summary: Everyone loves a good success story - especially when that story has connections to the community in which one lives.

(June 13, 2007)-Everyone loves a good success story – especially when that story has connections to the community in which one lives.

The community of Morris has often been a nurturing environment and launching pad for many innovative people over the years: entrepreneurs, artists, educators, people with political aspiration. Many who have lived within these borders, whether as students passing through or long term citizens, have gone on to accomplish noteworthy feats.

Still, while their individual achievements are exciting to hear about and often encourage others to chase after their own dreams, perhaps the most noteworthy of such people are those who saw a future far greater than their own personal goals and ambitions and have used their success to create avenues of blessing and assistance to others who need it most.

Paul Brifo, an alumni of the University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM), is just such a person. In the late 1990's, Brifo determined that he would leave his home in Ghana, pursue an education in the United States, build a successful future for himself and his family, and then give back to the people of his home in Africa.

Brifo chose Morris as the doorway to that dream and came to UMM as an International student.

"I had six cousins and one brother who all went to school in Morris," said Brifo. "My brother recommended UMM and said it was a good school with hard working students."

Brifo was 37 years old and married with one son when he arrived in 1999. Leaving his family and coming to Morris was not easy and Brifo faced numerous challenges while here. But, he credits the difficulties he experienced and the support he received in Morris with helping to develop his character to accomplish what he needed to accomplish.

In 2001, Brifo lost his uncle, who had promised financial assistance to help with his education. But, as one source dried up, local sources flourished.

"With the help of Tom McRoberts, who I was living with at the time," said Brifo, "I applied for financial aid. I also had help from my friends in Morris and my church. People would put money in an envelope and give it to me. These are the things I remember."

After graduating from UMM in 2003, Brifo obtained a job with Citigroup in the finance and accounting division and relocated to Arlington, Texas. Very quickly, he began giving back. In 2004, Brifo began collecting clothing from generous people and organizations around the state of Texas and shipped them to orphanages in rural Ghana. He has spent the better part of three years organizing, financing, and administering this work entirely from his own funds and

spare time.

In early 2007, he established “The Paul Brifo Foundation” to continue this work and expand its reach.

“I started this Foundation as a result of my desire to alleviate poverty, disease and suffering in Africa,” said Brifo. “Donated clothes to Ghana are a big financial relief to the beneficiaries because of the high cost of living. Basic necessities of life like food, shelter and clothing are expensive.”

The Brifo Foundation now collects unwanted clothing items from the people living in the United States, launders and reconditions the items, and presents them to infants, young adults, and adults in rural Africa who are in need of clothing but cannot afford to acquire them.

“People in Africa are so appreciative to receive the clothing that we take for granted here in America,” said Brifo. “Something as simple as clothing is so readily available here. I often receive donations that still have tags on them.”

Over the past three years approximately 1200 people have benefited from Brifo’s program. Currently the foundation supplies clothing primarily to orphanages and churches. Eventually, they will reach out to schools for the blind and disabled.

In 2004, Brifo shipped 200 articles of clothing to Africa. In 2006, the number quadrupled. In April of 2007 alone, Brifo shipped more than 800 items of clothing to rural Ghana.

But, for Brifo, this is just the beginning of the vision and work he has planned for the future. Brifo intends to expand his network of contacts in the coming years and intends to reach out to other nations.

He recently made a new contact in Kenya and is making plans for distribution. He is also looking toward neighboring Burkina Faso. Burkina Faso is located in the western part of Africa. It is bordered to the east by Niger, to the north and west by Mali, and to the south by Cote D’voire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin.

Burkina Faso's high population density and limited natural resources result in poor economic prospects for the majority of its citizens. Recent unrest in Cote d'Ivoire and northern Ghana has hindered the ability of several hundred thousand seasonal Burkinabe farm workers to find employment in neighboring countries.

Since the clothing items he provides are not to be sold to the residents, Brifo said getting a trusted team to work with will be quite challenging, and he does not select his contacts in this work casually.

“Used clothes in Africa can fetch lots of money,” said Brifo. “The clothes that I donate are free. Because of the high demand for used clothes in Africa, one may be tempted to sell them for cash. So I am very cautious of who I use as my contact person.”

Brifo is now actively in search of grants and other forms of support to help the work.

He plans to solicit more funds from corporate and non-corporate entities, write more letters to clothing manufacturers to donate factory rejects, and educate the residents of the United States about the economic plight of the African countries and the need for them to respond through their generous giving in kind and cash.”

For more information or to learn how to contribute, visit the foundation web site at [PaulBrifo](#).

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